

VZCZCXRO4424  
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHSI #2542/01 2821138  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 091138Z OCT 07  
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7865  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002542

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: OKRUASHVILI PLEADS GUILTY AND RECANTS ALLEGATIONS

REF: A. TBILISI 2532

[1](#)B. TBILISI 2415

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A video-taped testimony by Irakli Okruashvili, confessing to charges of extortion and criminal negligence and recanting his accusations against President Saakashvili, was broadcast on Georgian television October 8. Presidential Advisor Giga Bokeria said Okruashvili may have realized there was substantial evidence against him on serious charges and therefore he testified in order to get out on bail and reduce the penalties. Shortly after Okruashvili's television appearance, President Saakashvili told the Ambassador that Okruashvili testified of his own volition. Nevertheless, opposition leaders immediately raised suspicions that the statement was obtained by coercion. The General Prosecutor's Office released Okruashvili early morning October 9 on GEL 10 million (USD 6 million) bail, an unprecedented amount in Georgia. The opposition released a joint statement vowing to continue their campaign for early parliamentary elections. The ruling party challenged businessman and government critic Badri Patarkatsishvili, an Okruashvili supporter, to enter the political arena through normal means, not by "plotting intrigues." End Summary.

-----  
Okruashvili Recants Charges Against President; Pleads Guilty  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) In an October 8 conversation with the Ambassador, Giga Bokeria, an MP and Saakashvili insider, said that Okruashvili admitted guilt to several of the charges against him and recanted his allegations against the president entirely on his own initiative. Bokeria said it was likely Okruashvili knew substantial evidence against him exists and that he faces the likelihood of a long imprisonment, and he hoped to get the penalties reduced. President Saakashvili himself told the Ambassador on October 8 that Okruashvili recognized that many of his colleagues were likely to accept plea bargains and testify against him. His best option left was to make a plea and get out of jail on bail. Bokeria said Okruashvili, along with his new lawyer Giorgi Pauashvili (who has replaced Eka Beselia), negotiated the terms of bail and went through each charge individually, indicating how he would plead.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On October 8 the General Prosecutor's Office released a videotape of the confession which was broadcast on television, in which Okruashvili says the accusations he leveled at the President and other top level officials were not true. He said they were made to "gain political dividends." Okruashvili recanted all of his allegations against Saakashvili and in particular said that Saakashvili did not order him to "get rid of" Badri Patarkatsishvili. Okruashvili said he held meetings in Tbilisi and abroad with

Badri Patarkatsishvili from time to time and the statement that the president ordered Patarkatsishvili "liquidated" was meant to help Patarkatsishvili "gain political dividends" as well. Okruashvili said he kept Patarkatsishvili informed of his political plans and thought Patarkatsishvili-owned Imedi TV would support his political efforts. He said he knew nothing about PM Zhvania's death except the official version.

He also said his allegation that Saakashvili ordered Interior Minister Merabishvili and the ex-chief of the Interior Ministry's Department for Constitutional Security Dato Akhalaia to obtain compromising material against the clergy "was not true." Okruashvili said accusations of corruption against Merabishvili and Giga Bokeria were false. He recanted other accusations as well, saying he was trying to discredit the president and had no evidence Saakashvili secretly owns shares in the Georgian Railway, a local mobile

SIPDIS

phone company and Rustavi 2 TV as he had earlier alleged. He also recanted an earlier allegation that while serving as Interior Minister in 2004, he had arrested Saakashvili's uncle, Temur Alasania, for extortion.

14. (SBU) Addressing the criminal charges the government has brought against him, Okruashvili, said that in collusion with the President's ex-Parliamentary Secretary Dimitri Kitoshvili, he forced former lawmaker Jemal Svanidze into selling his shares in Geocell for USD 250,000. This was significantly below the market price of the shares, which was at least USD 10 million, according to the General Prosecutor's Office. Okruashvili also pleaded guilty to criminal negligence, saying he failed to properly control some agencies under his supervision while he was Defense Minister. Okruashvili did not address the charges of money laundering and misuse of power related to the purchase of his party headquarters. (Note: A foreign advisor to the

TBILISI 00002542 002 OF 002

Ministry of Finance told us October 9 that the Financial Monitoring Service is claiming it has a clear chain of possession of the cash used to buy the property linked to Ministry of Defense procurements.) Okruashvili was released overnight October 9 after the City Court ruled to release him on GEL 10 million (USD 6 million) bail (an unprecedented amount in Georgia), posted in cash and real estate. Industrialist MP Zurab Tkhemaladze commented that if Okruashvili could afford this amount, it was further confirmation he was involved in corruption.

-----  
Opposition and Government Reaction to Okruashvili's Testimony  
-----

15. (U) Opposition politicians immediately alleged Okruashvili's testimony was coerced. David Zurabishvili, opposition lawmaker from the Democratic Front party, said the confession reminded him of those made by dissidents in Soviet times, in particular recalling the public about-face of former president Zviad Gamsakhurdia when he was a prominent dissident under the Soviet system. Zviad Dzidziguri, Conservative Party leader, said "some people are unable to resist pressure exerted on them," referring to Okruashvili's testimony. People's Party leader Koba Davitashvili said Okruashvili's political destruction was an act of "political murder" carried out by the president and "his gang."

16. (C) On the other hand. National Movement MPs rejected allegations of coercion. MP Levan Bezhashvili said Okruashvili is not the kind of person who yields to any kind of pressure. MP Nino Kalandadze said Okruashvili's testimony came as a surprise, because "heroes do not look like this." Speaker of the Parliament Nino Burjanadze hailed the General Prosecutor's Office for debunking the "groundless accusations" leveled by Okruashvili at the President. She also said it was an important decision to release Okruashvili on bail so he can "make the same statements outside of jail."

Bokeria told the Ambassador that allegations that the confession was coerced are preposterous. He said Okruashvili will be at home and can freely change his story or recant his confession, but if he does, he will have to answer to everyone who saw the confession on television. Bokeria added that despite uncertainties, the confession and bail show that the country abides by the rule of law.

-----  
Opposition Vows to Continue Campaign Against Government  
-----

17. (U) Following Okruashvili's recantation, a group of ten opposition parties said at a joint news conference they remain committed to their plans to persuade authorities to hold parliamentary elections in April. MP Kakha Kukava from the Conservative Party said the latest turn of events does not mean an end to the campaign calling for early elections and culminating in a mass protest in Tbilisi on November 2. He added that resistance will continue and the goals and demands remain unchanged.

18. (U) Prior to the release of Okruashvili's statement on October 6, opposition leaders held an anti-government protest in Gurjaani, in eastern Kakheti. They screened a film by investigative reporter Vakhtang Komakhidze questioning the official version of events surrounding PM Zhvania's death. The screening in downtown Tbilisi was attended by several thousand people. The film was preceded by a brief protest rally where opposition leaders demanded authorities reveal "the truth" surrounding Zhvania's death.

-----  
Bokeria Challenges Patarkatsishvili  
-----

19. (U) National Movement Secretary General Davit Kirkitadze said October 8 there is sufficient evidence to prove the opposition is united by Patarkatsishvili, and claimed Patarkatsishvili is the one who "plotted this conspiracy." Following the release of Okruashvili's testimony, Giga Bokeria made a statement aimed at Patarkatsishvili, saying it is "unacceptable to plot intrigues and slander using others, and to hide behind their backs." He then challenged Patarkatsishvili to come out and participate in political "competition" and openly gain support, if he has political ambitions. Patarkatsishvili reportedly left Georgia for London immediately following the release of Okruashvili's testimony, but said in a public statement that he would return.  
TEFFT